

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS
U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

This application is a Continuation in Part of Application No. 10/051,655 filed on 01/22/2002.

5921864 July 13, 1999 Walker, Jay S. Electronic puzzle game

Distinctions between the referenced patent and the present invention:

- my invention is designed not merely for individual entertainment, like the referenced patent, but primarily for use as a marketing tool on the Internet, as well as for a television game show, for play on an electronic book (e-book) or cell telephone, or as an instructional tool;
- in the puzzle in the referenced patent the players guess at the required letters, whereas my invention is based on an acrostic puzzle which includes clues, both verbal and pictorial, for each word,
- in ordinary play with my invention there are no time limits on the player, as there is in the referenced patent;
- in my invention scores are built up rather than being deducted from a base score provided at the beginning of play, as they are in the referenced patent;
- in my invention the scores earned by the players may be converted into cash-equivalents, such as free hotel accommodations, frequent-flyer miles, or attendance at public events for which admission is usually charged.

**STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED
RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT**

Not Applicable

BACKGROUND – FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is designed as a marketing tool on the Internet. Its attractiveness as an amusement can draw potential customers, and information relating to the sponsor's products and services appears within both the clues, both verbal and pictorial, provided to solve the puzzle and within the quotation that constitutes the solution of the puzzle. No existing service combines the drawing power of a popular puzzle with the advertising power of the Internet. Customary Internet advertising merely transfers sections of established television commercials to a new medium and frequently is intrusive. The acrostic puzzles that appear in print publications not only lack the interactive elements in the present invention but appeal to the player's general knowledge, whereas the present invention focuses on a particular interest and leads the player to an awareness of the services and/or products of a particular sponsor. The present invention, furthermore, engages the viewer in an activity with immediate rewards. The pictorial elements are central to this design and function of the invention. These pictorial elements facilitate the introduction of the kind of action and color that characterize popular video games.

No currently available online puzzle contains these two elements, entertainment and advertising. The electronic puzzle game in patent 5921864 to Walker, July 13, 1999, has no function except to entertain the player. That puzzle is based on a word puzzle in which the players *guess* at the required letter, whereas the present invention is based on an *acrostic* puzzle which includes both *verbal and pictorial clues* for each clue word. In addition, the present invention is designed also for optional use as a television game show.

SUMMARY

A marketing tool in the form of an enhanced interactive acrostic puzzle can be played by one or more players on any of several computers or similar devices or as an interactive television game show. The prime function of this marketing tool is to inform each player about the products and services of various sponsors and to encourage their purchase. It performs this function by attracting players with the promise of rewards.

OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

The present invention is an interactive computer-based game designed as a marketing tool to attract players to one or more advertisers' messages. It is intended for individual or multi-player interaction on a spectrum of microprocessor devices, from personal digital assistants (PDAs) and cell phones to desktop computers. Puzzles can be stored on internal storage devices, downloaded in a group, downloaded individually, or played remotely from a central server.

In this enhancement, the quotation which is the solution to the puzzle may be derived from a book or other source which relates to a special interest, such as gardening, art, golf, or African American culture. Players can thereby be invited to follow links from the puzzle to the vendors of products related to those interests or to books dealing with them. As a marketing service, each puzzle can be hyperlinked to the Web sites sponsored by appropriate merchants of the services or products identified in the clues used to solve the puzzle. Hyperlinks can also provide pictorial and other non-verbal clues, such as reproductions of art works or brief musical selections. A slightly modified version of the puzzle can be played as a competitive television game show.

Further objects and advantages of my invention will become apparent from a consideration of the drawings and ensuing description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows the opening screen of the main embodiment, as viewed on a computer screen. The puzzle appears on the right with hyperlinked advertisements of sponsors on the left.

Fig. 2 shows the puzzle of the main embodiment enlarged for clarity.

Fig. 3 shows the mouse pointer positioned at a selected clue and the corresponding squares highlighted.

Fig. 4 shows a letter the player has selected in the letter tray. The pictorial animation associated with the subject matter of the puzzle (in this instance, golf) is positioned over the selected letter, H. That letter now appears in both the appropriate box of the clues and in the grid.

Fig. 5 shows the remaining letters of the selected clue word entered into their squares to spell the word HACKNEYED. Those letters appearing in their appropriate squares in the grid. The pictorial animation has moved over each letter as the player selects it by moving the mouse pointer along the letter tray.

Fig. 6 shows the option of replacing verbal clues with pictorial ones. A clickable button offers the player the option of viewing a pictorial clue.

Fig. 7 shows the pictorial clue (in this case, the professional golfer Gary Player), whose name is shown entered by the player into the squares adjacent to the clue button. These letters also appear in their appropriate squares in the grid.

Fig. 8 shows the puzzle of this embodiment completed by repeating the steps described in Figs. 3-7, with all clues filled in and the entire quotation visible.

Fig. 9 shows an alternative embodiment intended to promote a movie, in this instance *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The pictorial animations now represent major actors from that movie, Renee Zellwegger and Hugh Grant.

Fig. 10 shows the pictorial animations moving over the letters selected by the player and speaking the names of the letters selected. This information can also be provided aurally.

Fig. 11 shows this puzzle of this embodiment completed with all the clues filled in and the entire quotation visible.

Fig. 12 shows an additional alternative embodiment intended to played as a television quiz show.

LIST OF REFERENCE NUMERALS

1. Grid for the quotation
2. Open squares for the clue words
3. Clues
4. Letter tray
5. Score counter
6. "Word Hint" button
7. "Letter Hint" button
8. "More About This Book" button
- 8A. "More About This Film" button
9. "Mail This Puzzle to a Friend" button
10. Pictorial clue button
11. Pictorial clue
12. "Print Coupon" button
13. Prize award notice
14. Sponsors' advertisements
15. Pictorial animation
16. "Register for Prizes" button
17. Multiple players in television game show mode
18. Silhouette representing remote interactive player

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The marketing tool of this invention is a word puzzle (as shown in Fig. 1). It is designed to be played on many types of computer-based devices, such as a computer, wireless phone or personal digital assistant, or over a television network. The display comprises

- a list of clues with adjacent open squares into which letters are entered by the player or players to form words; letters are selected from a letter tray and their locations designated by a stylus or other appropriate means;
- a grid somewhat similar to that of a crossword puzzle, with open squares in which the letters entered into the clues simultaneously appear in order to form words and with dark squares to separate those words; letters entered by a player directly into the grid squares appear simultaneously in the clue squares;
- a tray of tiles representing the letters of the alphabet;
- pictorial animations that appear to carry the selected letters from the tile tray to their positions in the clues, and later, as words begin to form in the grid, directly into the grid. (Since each letter has a point value, the player accumulates a score, which is displayed in real time; the value of each letter entered directly into the grid is double that of letters entered into the clues, and double value is deducted from the score for wrong letters entered into either the grid or the clues. When the puzzle is completed, the grid contains a quotation from a book, the author and title of which are read vertically in the initial letters of the words entered into the clues.)
- a counter for the player's score;
- pictorial animations, related to the subject matter of the puzzle, which appear to carry the letter tiles from the letter tray to their selected positions in either the clues or the grid;
- for selected clues, pictorial animations that replace the verbal clues;
- various buttons to lead the player to options for further information or rewards.

The player who participates in solving the puzzle is thus engaged for a substantial period with material associated with a particular book. She/he may thus become interested enough to consider purchasing it. That option is offered by a "More About This Book" button, which can be hyperlinked to the website of a bookseller or the book's publisher. In addition, the puzzle may generate interest in a movie based on that book. Furthermore, the player may be attracted by the

subject matter of the puzzle, such as golf, gardening, or a particular ethnic culture. In such cases, the puzzle can be used as a marketing tool for targeted audiences. For example, golf players can be encouraged to purchase golfing gear, DVDs of golf instruction, accommodations at hotels with golf courses, airline packages to destinations with golf courses, and similar products and/or services associated with that sport. Parallel opportunities are obvious for many other defined audiences, such as gardening enthusiasts, movie fans, or members of ethnic groups.

Pictorial material can function in two ways to support the marketing function of this puzzle. First, there may be clues that are presented in pictorial rather than verbal form. If the puzzle is intended, for example, to appeal to persons interested in fine art, some of the clues could consist of artists' portraits, reproductions of art works, or scenes associated with art works (for example, the bridge at Arles associated with a famous painting by Van Gogh). For gardening enthusiasts, pictorial representations of flowers and plants can serve the same function. African Americans can be attracted by portraits of distinguished black personalities. Thus marketers of services and/or products of special interest to such groups can commission puzzles to integrate online marketing into their advertising campaigns in all media.

The second method of introducing pictorial material into the puzzle is to adapt the animated characters that appear to carry the letters to the clues or the grid to the subject matter of the puzzle. Once more, if the subject matter of the puzzle is golf, the pictorial animations can be golf players, shown teeing up and swinging. If it is a movie, the pictorial animations can be the leading actors from the film. This mode of linking the subject matter of the puzzle with the pictorial elements is an excellent way of reminding the player, during the entire time the puzzle is being solved, of the advertiser's message. According to Charles Buchwalter, vice president of Nielsen/NetRatings, an Internet audience measurement company (as reported in *The New York Times*, 1 March 2004), the growing use of high-speed Internet connections has made it more feasible for traditional companies to use video and animation in their online campaigns. These pictorial elements also facilitate the introduction of the kind of action and color that characterize popular video games.

DESCRIPTION -- MAIN EMBODIMENT

The puzzle of the invention consists of a display, on the screen of a computer, personal digital assistant, cell telephone or similar device, which comprises

- a grid similar to that of a crossword puzzle,
- a list of clues and open squares, in the grid and adjacent to the clues, for entering the letters of the clue words,
- darkened spaces in the grid to separate words,
- buttons for such options as "Letter Hint," "Word Hint," and "More About This Book,"
- images of tiles containing the letters of the alphabet with their values,
- a score counter,
- optional pictorial elements to replace selected verbal clues and
- pictorial animations to enhance the visual appeal of the puzzle.

In the optional alternative of play as a television game show, the "More About This Book" button can be omitted. Representations of the faces of the players may be added, including one for a player competing remotely. The player's final score can be translated into prize money, frequent-flyer miles, discount coupons or similar inducements to enter a Web site frequently and play the puzzle of the invention.

OPERATION -- MAIN EMBODIMENT

A preferred embodiment of the closure of the present invention is illustrated in Fig. 1. To solve the puzzle of the invention in individual play or in interactive competition, a player must select a word from the clues **3** and enter one or more letters from the letter tray **4** into the appropriate adjacent squares **2**. As those letters are entered, they also appear in the empty spaces of the grid **1** as elements of a quotation. The quotation will be completed when all the required letters will have been entered into the clues **3**. As the words in the quotation become evident, the player may enter the missing letters **4** of such words directly into the empty spaces of the grid. Letters **4** so entered earn double points for each of those letters as recorded on the score counter **5**. Another aid to completing the puzzle of the invention is that the initial letters of the clue words in the spaces **2**, when read vertically, spell the name of the quotation's author (and in the case of a longer quotation, the title of the work from which it was taken). A player may use a "Letter Hint" **7** or "Word Hint" **6** button to have the computer program enter the desired letter or hint; such action deducts double the basic number of points on the score counter **5** for that letter or word. Adjacent to the elements of the puzzle are exhibited the advertisements **14** of sponsors. Also provided are buttons for "More About This Book" **8A**, and "Mail This Puzzle to a Friend" **9** and "Register for Prizes" **16**.

Fig. 3 shows the player's mouse pointer positioned on a selected clue **3** and the corresponding open spaces **2** adjacent to the clue "Ordinary and unimaginative; trite" highlighted. In Fig. 4, the player has positioned the mouse pointer on the first letter of the selected clue word **2** and the letter H has been selected from the letter tray **4**. The pictorial animation **15** associated with the subject matter of the puzzle (in this example, golf) appears over selected letter in the letter tray **4**. In Fig. 5 the player has selected the remaining letters of the word HACKNEYED and the pictorial animation has moved successively over each of these letters in turn, swinging its golf club as each letter is selected.

Fig. 6 shows the option for replacing a verbal clue with a pictorial clue **10**. Fig. 7 shows that when the player presses the "Click Here for Clue" button, a pictorial clue **11** appears (in this example, the professional golfer Gary Player). By the method described above, the player inserts the letters "GARY PLAYER" into the appropriate open spaces **2**, and the same letters appear in their appropriate spaces in the grid **1**.

Fig. 8 shows the puzzle completed in the grid **1** and all the clues **2** filled in. An announcement **13** appears (in this example, “You have just won 97 Frequent Flyer Miles from Southwest Airlines”), and a button **12** appears “Print Coupon” which allows the player to claim the prize awarded.

DESCRIPTION AND OPERATION -- ALTERNATIVE EMBODIMENT

Fig. 9 illustrates an embodiment modified to promote a movie, preferably adapted from a book. Added to the set of buttons is one “More About This Film” 8, which links to a website promoting the movie. The pictorial animations represent characters from the movie (in this example, Hugh Grant and Renee Zellwegger from the movie *Bridget Jones's Diary*, adapted from the novel of the same title and the source of the quotation). Fig. 10 Shows one of the pictorial animations 15 appearing to carry a selected letter from the letter tray 4 to its selected position in the clues 3. An audible message can be played confirming the player's choice of letter. Fig. 11 shows the puzzle completed and an announcement 13 appears “You Have a Chance to Win a Trip to the Movie Premiere!”

DESCRIPTION AND OPERATION -- ALTERNATIVE EMBODIMENT

Alternatively, the puzzle of the invention may be played as a competitive television game. In such use, there may be several players **16**, each of whom enters letters according to rules established by the promoters of the television game. For each iteration of the game, the values of the letters may be increased at some predetermined rate. When the game is played interactively, one or more contestants **19** outside the studio may participate by means of a home computer, wireless phone, interactive television set or similar means. As in the mode designed for individual play, both the quotation and the clues may be associated with the services and/or products of the sponsor or sponsors, whose commercial messages can be displayed during intermissions, or incorporated into the quotation and/or the clues, as in the other modes of operation.

CONCLUSION, RAMIFICATIONS AND SCOPE

There are several advantages of the puzzle of the invention over previous computer-based acrostic puzzles. First, it can serve as a marketing tool through association with the vendor or vendors of particular services or products. Next, it can be played on personal digital assistants or wireless phones as well as computers, both desktop and laptop, so that it is accessible in many leisure situations where players can seek relief from boredom. It also provides for scoring which can be translated into prize money, frequent-flyer miles, or similar inducements to enter a Web site frequently and play the puzzle of the invention. The "More About This Book" button can provide a hyperlink to the Web site of the book's publisher, or to a bookseller who wishes to sell copies of it. In addition or alternatively, it can be linked to the vendor of products and/or services associated with the topic of the book, such as gardening, fine art, or a particular culture. The optional use of pictorial clues (rather than verbal) permits intriguing associations with sports, leisure activities, and targeted ethnic cultures. As well as art works in museums, plants or flowers, or similar real-world objects. These can serve as clues to words in the puzzle of the invention.

The optional use of animated pictorial characters that appear to carry copies of the tiles into position can introduce an element of playfulness that is not found in either the print versions of acrostic puzzles or their present computer-based versions. The same is true of the optional use of accompanying sound effects. These pictorial and auditory elements also facilitate the introduction of the kind of action and color that characterize popular video games. More relevant to the basic purpose of the invention, such pictorial animations may (as when they represent the actors in a movie) be associated with a commercial product and generate interest in that product.